

24. THE ORTHOGRAPHY OF ENGLISH NAMES OF BIRDS

In any Handlist, Checklist or any other list of birds, the inconsistencies shown in the orthography of the popular names is always a matter for wonder. Thus, in one Checklist which I saw recently, the following appeared on opposite pages, 'Water-Hen' and 'Watercock'. Similarly, person may write 'Sea Eagle' in one place and 'Eagle-Owl' or even 'Eagle-owl' in another.

In an attempt to bring some order out of chaos, the following 'Rules' are submitted for the consideration of the Editors and other readers of this journal. In framing them Simplicity, Clarity and Consistency have been regarded as of fundamental importance.

A: NOUNS

Where the name of a bird consists of two NOUNS, the words should be joined by a hyphen, thus:—

Serpent-eagle, Magpie-robin, Hawk-cuckoo, Eagle-owl, Hen-harrier, Snow-pigeon, Scops-owl, Fish-owl and so on.

For the sake of simplicity it is suggested that the second noun be written entirely in lower case.

The exceptions to this Rule would be:—

(i) Where constant usage has made a different form familiar, e.g. Peafowl, Nuthatch, Nutcracker, Stonechat, Flycatcher, Woodpecker, Sandpiper.

The Rule of simplicity would appear to demand the elimination of the hyphen wherever possible and, to my mind, this, in most cases, could be applied. Clarity, however, forbids the writing together of two words, one of which ends and the other begins with a vowel, for example, 'Eagleowl'. A name which is a borderline case is 'Laughingthrush': 'laughing' being a present participle can be used as either a verbal adjective or a noun. If it is regarded as a noun the word should be written 'Laughing-thrush'; if an adjective, 'Laughingthrush' or 'Laughing Thrush'. [See Rule B (1)]. I favour 'Laughing-thrush'.

(ii) Where a proper name is used, as in the examples that follow, the hyphen should be omitted and the words written separately each beginning with a capital letter, thus:

Nicobar Pigeon, Sarus Crane, Shahin Falcon.

B: ADJECTIVES

(1) A single qualifying adjective should be written, as in common practice, apart from the noun, e.g. Rosy Pastor, Green Loriquet.

Exceptions would be those which usage has joined and no man can now put asunder, e.g. Bluechat, Greenshank, Redshank, Whitethroat, Bluebird.

(2) Where there are two qualifying adjectives, I am of the opinion that they should be written together, thus:

Whitebellied Sea-eagle, Bluetailed Bee-eater, Whitebreasted Waterhen, Whitecollared Kingfisher.

(3) Where the description requires the use of more than two words, clarity requires the use of hyphens, thus:

Black-and-Yellow Grosbeak, Black-and-Orange Flycatcher.